

Selectmen's Report

In 2005, the major events were the complete revaluation of property within the Town and consideration of the relationship of Harpswell and Maine School Administrative District 75 (SAD 75). In addition, the Town Meeting adopted the Comprehensive Plan Amendments of 2005. For the first, time, the Selectmen organized a meeting on Town matters for non-voting property owners.

Town Meetings. The Annual Town Meeting took place on March 13, 2005, after a one-day weather-caused postponement. A Town referendum vote took place on June 14, 2005 relative to the position of Harbormaster. The proposal to authorize a full-time position was approved. A second Town referendum vote took place on November 8, 2005 concerning proposed funding for the demolition of buildings at George J. Mitchell Field. The proposal was not approved.

Selectmen. Samuel A. Alexander was elected as Selectman at the Annual Town Meeting. Gordon L. Weil was elected by the Selectmen as chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

The Selectmen decided to increase the Board's efficiency by assuming individual roles in dealing with specific subject areas. Traditionally, each Selectman has assumed liaison functions for certain activities or committees. In addition, the Selectmen agreed to support the actions of individual members on certain matters in which they would have lead responsibility. Policy matters continue to be the responsibility of the Board.

In 2005, after the Annual Town Meeting, the following liaison and lead assignments were made: (1) Alexander: Board of Appeals/Planning Board, Comprehensive Plan Implementation, Conservation Commission, Marine Resources; (2) Theberge: Fire and Rescue, Harbor and Waterfront, Solid Waste, Town Lands and (3) Weil: Finance and Budget, Library, Recreation, Television and Telecommunications.

Assessing. With the assistance of Vision Appraisal, the Selectmen/Assessors completed the Town-wide revaluation. The result of the revaluation brought the Town's own valuation in line with the State valuation. In addition, the method used was simplified, which is designed to enable the valuation to be updated more easily each year. Seven basic assessing districts were established for the Town; each of the four main year-round areas plus three areas for the smaller islands. The Selectmen/Assessors took control of the process and dealt with hundreds of individual matters in an effort both to maintain a nondiscriminatory system and to recognize actual differences among properties.

The Selectmen/Assessors also developed a more streamlined and open process for dealing with abatement requests. In cases where policy issues are raised or the staff has recommended denial, the Board of Assessors meets in session separate from the regular Selectmen's meetings. This approach allows applicants the opportunity to present their positions orally in addition to the written application and to respond to questions from the Board. Requests to be approved are handled routinely at other times.

SAD 75. The Selectmen continued their efforts to renegotiate the cost-sharing formula for SAD 75 and provided regular reports at the meetings. Discussions early in the year focused on the introduction of the State Essential Programs and Services (EPS) program, which would result in an increasing share of the District budget falling to Harpswell. An attempt to reach agreement with the other three towns in SAD 75 to phase in the added impact on Harpswell was not successful. The State Education Department then proposed that Harpswell should receive a minimum of assistance by coverage of 25% of Special Education Costs. When the other three towns refused to make any contribution to this assistance, the State provided the full 25% amount.

The SAD 75 Board of Directors then decided to open a formal process on renegotiating the cost-sharing formula with the participation of a state-appointed facilitator. The Selectmen appointed Selectmen Theberge and Weil and the four Harpswell SAD 75 Board Members appointed Board Member David Johnson to the Harpswell delegation. During the talks Harpswell proposed that all future SAD 75 budget increases be the same for each town, but it became apparent that other towns would not support this proposal. No proposal was able to gain sufficient support. After four meetings, the group voted 10-2 (Theberge and Weil in the majority and Johnson in the minority) to terminate formal negotiations.

In December, the Selectmen received a petition signed by a sufficient number of voters to call for the initiation of the withdrawal process from SAD 75. A vote on the petition article was scheduled for a vote in January 2006. Legislation was introduced to provide Harpswell with a phase-in of Special Education funding to reach 100% in 2009-2010.

Non-voting property owners. Town assessing records indicate that 42% of the property value within Harpswell is owned by people who vote in other jurisdictions. In recognition of the effect of Town actions on these people and their property, the Selectmen organized a meeting with these people at the beginning of the July 4th weekend. Based on the interest shown by non-voting property owners, the meeting was a success and the Selectmen indicated that they are prepared to consider some actions, prior to the 2006 summer, to respond to concerns expressed at the meeting.

Fiscal year and tax payments. The Selectmen considered changing the fiscal year from the calendar year to a year beginning on July 1. They finally decided against this change, mainly because it would most likely cause the Town Meeting to be moved from March to June, which would not be consistent with the traditions of the Town. However, they proposed and the Town Meeting approved two tax payment dates. In practice, some people found that having the ability to pay in two installments was helpful, and the change appeared to serve its intended purpose, while many continued to make a single tax payment.

George J. Mitchell Field houses. The U.S. Department of Defense returned the ownership of the last remaining portion of the former Fuel Depot property to the Town. The area includes two houses and two garages. The Selectmen obtained a preliminary environmental review, which revealed no apparent problems.

Capital Road Program. The Town began the reconstruction of those municipal roads that are in bad condition especially with regard to the amount of traffic they carry. In the first phase of the program, seven roads were reconstructed, within available resources approved by the Town Meeting, supplementing two previously done. The Selectmen played a direct role in this program. As the needed reconstruction of roads is determined, proposals for further capital spending will be prepared. This program is distinct from annual road maintenance.

Libraries. The Selectmen negotiated and concluded the Agreement between the Town and Curtis Memorial Library, which provides for the services made available to Harpswell in return for its financial contribution. The Agreement also includes the appointment of Harpswell residents to the Curtis Board and committees. The Agreement provides for Curtis to be Harpswell's full service library and is contingent on Town funding.

Curtis proposed to the Town the development of a community library on Harpswell Neck. It offered to provide to a local Harpswell Neck library board the initial collection of books, certain Internet-related facilities and furnishings as well as training and consulting. After potential sites were reviewed by Town and Curtis representatives, it was decided to propose to the Town Meeting the use of a house and garage at George J. Mitchell Field.

Recycling Center/Transfer Station. The Recycling Center was named in honor of A. Dennis Moore, who had been a valued employee there since its inception. A dedication ceremony was held. The Town concluded a collective bargaining agreement with the union representing the workers at these facilities.

Regulatory matters. The Selectmen dealt with following licensing matters: Wharves and Weirs Act – 14 applications, 13 approved, one not approved; consent agreements (with fines) -2 approved; Alcoholic Beverage -3 approved ; Junkyard -1 approved; Shellfish License-1 revoked.

Legal and litigation. In the action brought by Elizabeth Ann Chaplin against the Town relative to access to Mackerel Cove on Bailey Island, settlement negotiations continued, as required by the Superior Court. Norman Lauze, whose after-the-fact wharf application on Great Island was not approved, appealed to Superior Court.

The negotiations concerning the Graveyard Point Town Landing were successfully concluded during the year, resolving in the Town's favor a matter that had been pending for several years.

Town auditor. After deciding that good policy called for the change of auditor from time to time, the Selectmen, with the cooperation of the Treasurer, called for new proposals. The result was that the financial reports in this Annual Town Report were reviewed by the newly selected company. The Selectmen express the Town's appreciation for the work done by Berry, Fowles & Co. over many years.

Appreciation. Harpswell relies on the help of many volunteers who dedicate their time, talent and efforts for the good of the community. Many of them serve within the framework of Town government. Their contribution is both invaluable and greatly appreciated. As has become customary, but is no less true because of its repetition, the Selectmen greatly appreciate the outstanding and dedicated service of the staff, who are always willing to put in any extra effort required to produce the best possible services for Harpswell. We know the people of Harpswell share our appreciation for their work.



*Gordon L. Weil
Chairman*



*Lee E. Theberge
Selectman*



*Samuel W. Alexander
Selectman*